

How to Write an Effective Press Release

One of the biggest ways we can make a difference on our campaigns is to get media coverage and shape the conversation around our issues. A press release is a unique way to earn media coverage, because it gives the reporter all the content they need to produce a story up front and within our message frame.

In order to maximize our ability to get our message out about our campaigns, we follow five key rules when we write press releases:

Make it timely: We strive to send a press release out within three hours of breaking news, and when possible, we draft press releases ahead of time when we know news is going to break. Timely press releases are more likely to get picked up in the press.

Keep it short and simple: The longer a press release, the less likely it will be to be read and taken seriously. If you find this a challenge because you have a lot of information you want to get across, just remember the next rule...

Put the most important things first: Make sure the most important information—Who, What, When, Where, and Why—is at the very top of your press release. This ensures that the key information you want to convey will come across, even if the recipient doesn't read the entire press release.

Include at least one soundbite quote: Reporters are always looking for colorful quotes to include in their stories. Make sure you have approval from a spokesperson to use a snappy quote in the release that reporters can use easily. Be cautious not to include too many quotes - remember, short and simple is best.

Think like a journalist: There are things journalists look for when they receive a press release: something that matches their beat (or issue area), something they can sell to their editors, something front page-worthy, or something readers are likely to read and share. They also look for names of prominent people who might be affected, because that adds another hook to their story. Before you start writing, put yourself in their shoes and imagine what might appeal to them.

Sending Out a Press Release

Once your press release is written, the hardest work is done. But as you email out your press release, keep these tips in mind to make sure your email is professional and more likely to be opened and read:

Paste the press release into the body of the email. Don't attach it. This saves the recipient a step and avoids spam filters.

Use a clean and simple subject line following sentence case. Avoid ALL CAPS. Put recipients' email addresses into the BCC line. This allows people to focus on the content of your press release rather than the list of other reporters you sent it to.

Your Turn

Use the space below to plan a press release for a campaign you're working on. Remember to refer back to your campaign's message box and make sure your press release is aligned with that framing.

Your campaign:

Key information for your press release:

Who:

What:

When:

Where:

Why:

The very first sentence of your press release should summarize all five Ws. Draft the first sentence here:

Who will your press release quote, and why?

Write a sample quote that is aligned with your message frame:

How will you make this press release appealing to a reporter? What is your hook?